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WRITINGS OF BOCCACCIO:

No. II.

IN the first Number of the Magazine, a slight sketch was given of the life of Boccaccio; chiefly for the purpose of acquainting the general reader with his character as a literary man, and with the services which he rendered to posterity, by his exertions in promoting the early revival of learning. This naturally leads us to take a cursory view of his writings. These are voluminous; but, as many of them are scarcely known in this country, and others have fallen into neglect even in Italy, our attention may be confined to such of them as have acquired the greatest celebrity. It should be observed, however, that the neglect into which some of them have fallen, does not detract from their original value. As he entered with peculiar ardour into the cultivation of ancient learning, he wrote several works on classical subjects; which, though of great use in his own day, have been superseded by more copious and correct illustrations in later times. Among these may be mentioned, an Abridgment of Roman History, from Romulus to Nero; with two others, of greater value: one on the Genealogy of the Gods, forming a system of ancient mythology; and another on Mountains, Rivers, Lakes, &c. in which many errors of ancient geography were rectified. He also wrote a History of Celebrated Women; and another work of a similar kind, in nine books, concerning the Misfortunes of Illustrious Characters. This work, unimportant in itself, is interesting in the history of literature, as the model on which some early pieces of considerable celebrity were formed.*—These were all in Latin; and it has been observed concern-

* It was soon translated into French, by one Laurence; but so paraphrastically, and with such additions, as to be almost a new Work. This translation was imitated in verse by Lydgate, one of the earliest English poets: "The Falle of Princis and Princessis, and other Nobles; translated into English by John Ludgate, Monke of the Monastery of Seint Edmundesbury, at the commandement of the worthy Prynce Humfrey, Duke of Gloucestre, beginnyne at Adam, and endinge with Kinge John, taken prisoner en France by Prince Edward."—Lond. 1494. It was reprinted in 1558, under a new title, "The Tragedies gathered by John Bochas, of all such Princes as fell from theyr Estates through the mutability of Fortune, &c.—wherein may be seen what vices bring menne to destruccion, wthy notable warnings how the like may be auoyed." Of this poem, some specimens are given by Warton, who observes "that it is not improperly styled a set of tragedies, for the plan is dramatic, and partly suggested by the pageants of the times. The different personages, all eminent for rank and misfortune, appear before the poet, and relate their respective sufferings. The figures of these spectres are sometimes finely drawn."—*Hist. of Poetry, Vol. II.* This work of Lydgate again became the model of a long poem, better known: "A Mirror for Magistrates: a true Chronicle of the untimely falls of Princes and men of note, from the entrance of Brute into this island, until this our age, 1559." It was begun by Sackville, Earl of Buckhurst, who only finished the Induction, and the Complaint of Henry, Duke of Buckingham, written with considerable spirit:—but the collection was afterwards continued by several of his cotemporaries, and was very popular in that age, affording materials to Shakspere for some of his historical Plays.

ing them, that though they were equally remarkable, in the age in which they were composed, for their extensive information, and the clearness of their arrangement, yet the style is by no means so pure and elegant as that of his friend Petrarch. Some other historical works, that have been ascribed to him, are now regarded as spurious.

His Italian writings have had greater celebrity. We have already adverted to his Life of Dante, and his Commentaries on the *Inferno*; which are still regarded as full of the most valuable information. He wrote also several romances, that attracted considerable notice. The largest of these, entitled *Filocopo*, is a romance of chivalry, modelled from an old work, with some improvements; but retaining the great characteristics of that species of composition. Another is still more interesting, as being the earliest specimen of the love romance, of which he has been considered by some as the inventor. It is entitled, *L'Ammorosa Fiammetta*; and, instead of deeds of chivalry, is chiefly occupied with the loves of Panfilo and Fiammetta—commonly understood to refer to himself, and Maria, daughter of Robert King of Naples, whose favour we have seen he at one time enjoyed; although many circumstances render this supposition very doubtful. The chief interest consists in the varied delineation of passion; particularly that of the lady, who describes her own feelings, and her sufferings from the fickleness of her lover, with a fervour and voluptuousness of manner, beyond what is common even in Italian writings. It abounds also with long conversations, and even with dissertations, on such topics as were discussed in the celebrated “Courts of Love,” common in that age among the Troubadours. These are generally tedious; and the perusal is rendered still more tiresome, by the style, which is too measured and inflated even for harmonious prose.* Other works of his, on similar subjects, are now so little known, that it is unnecessary to mention them.—We may advert, however, even in this rapid sketch, to two pieces of a different description, which of late have been brought into notice, by imitations of them in Chaucer. They are both heroic poems, and the earliest specimens of that species of composition in Italian. The one is *La Theseida*, in

* Both these romances were also translated at an early period into English, under the following characteristic titles:—I. “ Thirteene most pleasant and delectable questions, entituled, Philocoþo: or, a Disport of divers Noble Personages; composed in Italian by M. John Bocace, Florentine, and Poet Laureate; and turned into English by H. Gr. 1587.”—II. “ Amorous Fiammetta: wherein is sette downe a catalogue of all and singular passions of Love and Jealousie, incident to an enamoured yong Gentlewoman; with a notable caueat for all women to eschewe deceitful and wicked love, by an apparent example of a Neapolitan lady; her approved and long miseries, and with many sounde dehortations from the same. First wrytten in Italian, by Master John Bocace, the learned Florentine, and Poet Laureate; and now done into English by Bart. Young, of the Mid. Temple, 1587.”

fifty cantos, founded on the exploits of the ancient Theseus; but, at the same time, of an allegorical cast, illustrating the triumphs of Wisdom, Glory, Riches, Love, and Fortune.—This was imitated by Chaucer, with various improvements, in one of the most regular and beautiful of his tales, *Palamon and Arcite*.*—The other is *Il Filostrato*, founded on the story of Troilus and Cressida. This has of late attracted notice, as the probable model of one of Chaucer's earliest poems, on the same subject.†

We hurry over these writings, now chiefly known among the curiosities of literature, to consider the work on which the fame of Boccaccio principally rests,—The DECAMERON; or, Ten Days' Entertainment. The plan is well known.—During the plague which raged in Italy and over Europe in 1348, a company of ladies and gentlemen withdrew from Florence, to some beautiful rural retreats in the neighbourhood: where they endeavoured to divert their thoughts from the dreadful scenes they had witnessed, by engaging in various amusements, especially in narrating stories, commonly on specified subjects. As they continued this amusement for ten days, and told ten stories each day, the stories or novels amount to one hundred, of various length and interest; “sometimes serious or tragical, at others humorous or ridiculous; exhibiting all the perturbations incident to mankind, of affection and of aversion, of hope and of fear.” This variety, in connexion with the spirit of the narration, and the beauty of the style, rendered the work, notwithstanding its obvious blemishes, one of the most popular in modern times. It immediately attracted general notice; and was circulated very extensively in MS. for about a century; when liberties of all kinds were taken with it at every transcription. It was first printed in 1470, and passed through several editions before 1500: while the subsequent editions in different countries, have been extremely numerous. It has also been translated into every European language.—So early as 1566, an English translation was published by William Paynter, which was afterwards re-printed. In 1741 an improved translation appeared, the author of which is not now generally known; but in 1805, this translation was still more

* See some interesting extracts from Boccaccio's poem, and from what is more curious, a literal translation of it into Greek, printed at Venice, 4to. 1529, in Warton's History of English Poetry, Vol. 2. Section XII. It was a common practice among the Greek refugees, to translate popular pieces of Italian poetry, into Greco-barbarous iambics. Pastor Fido was thus translated.

† Godwin has investigated the grounds of this supposition in his Life of Chaucer, Vol. I. ch. 14. Chaucer says that he imitated a poem on this subject, of one Lollius; and Godwin contends, that this must have been a different person from Boccaccio, of whom nothing is known. But after all his reasoning, the common opinion remains the most probable; that Chaucer refers to this poem of Boccaccio, under another name, the origin of which cannot be ascertained.

modernised, with various alterations, chiefly with a view to soften the more objectionable passages, by Edward Dubois, of the Middle Temple, better known by some other works: such as the *Wreath*, and *Old Nick*, a novel. This translation has of late been re-printed in various forms, at a moderate price, and is now in general circulation.—Yet, notwithstanding the re-publication of these Tales in an English dress, it is not likely that the whole collection will be generally read; nor, indeed, would this be desirable. Many of the Tales are not suited to modern taste. Some of these are stained with the grossness of the age in which Boccaccio wrote; from which few of the early writers even in our own country were free; and many are uninteresting in their materials as well as in their plan. They are too much occupied with the same kind of characters and incidents; commonly the intrigues of lovers, or rather the tricks to which they had recourse, to conceal their intercourse, which was often criminal. The monotony thus produced is increased by the plan of grouping many stories under one head—ten each day, all illustrative of some common principle. They are also frequently deficient in character, depending more upon incident or trick; while the characters introduced have become obsolete or hackneyed. The age of Boccaccio is against him. He has been superseded by numerous successors, who have adapted themselves better to the taste of their contemporaries, and have gratified that taste almost to satiety, by an immense variety of models, purer, as well as more elegant, than those employed by earlier and ruder authors.

These are strong reasons against the perusal, and perhaps the re-publication of the *whole* of the Decameron, but not against *selections* from it. It is one of the works, indeed, from which selections are particularly desirable, as it contains many passages of great beauty and interest, which could be read with freedom and pleasure by themselves; but which are concealed and injured by the mass of exceptionable matter with which they are connected in the original.—We propose, therefore, to select occasionally some of the most interesting parts; chiefly for the purpose of adverting to passages in other works, to which they may bear any striking analogy.

The *Introduction*, which explains the plan of the work, contains a vivid and affecting description of the PLAGUE: which, we have seen, is represented as the occasion of the retirement of the party, by whom the stories are narrated. The author apologises for presenting, at the very commencement, a picture so disagreeable; representing it as not only necessary to his plan, but calculated, by contrast, to prepare the mind for the entertainment that follows; and comparing it to a rugged

and steep mountain placed before a delightful valley, which appears more beautiful and pleasant, as the way to it is more difficult. The gloominess of the subject, in like manner, makes us hesitate about entering so minutely into his description, as its beauty and celebrity would otherwise require. Yet the Plague, with all its horrors, has often been described, both in history and fiction; and such description has been as much admired as any species of composition. We are therefore induced to dwell a little on the gloomy picture; chiefly for the purpose of comparing it with other delineations of similar scenes, to which it bears a resemblance.

The descriptions of such scenes that have been most admired, are of two kinds. Some are rather medical, exhibiting the nature and progress of the disease; while others are historical or poetical, presenting only the circumstances that strike a general observer. The most celebrated partake of the peculiarities of both; but belong rather to the latter class. It is remarkable, too, that these commonly resemble each other in the great features, without appearing to be mere copies. This arises probably from the nature of the scenes themselves: which have a melancholy similarity, and yet present sufficient variety to attract the successive observations of genius. Thucydides, it is well known, has furnished the model on which such descriptions are formed; while succeeding artists have either expanded his pictures, by introducing embellishments that harmonize with the original; or, imitating only his outline, have filled it up with new objects, and original colours.—The pleasure which is commonly felt from the perusal of such descriptions, exhibits some of the most remarkable peculiarities in human nature. The most dreadful calamities of life, at the reality of which every heart shudders, presents pictures by which the imagination is fascinated. The fancy, indeed, often “sups full of horrors,” and is delighted with the repast. The pleasure, of course, arises from something else than horror, or the mere contemplation of wretchedness. Scenes of sorrow present objects of deep interest, that are exhibited in richer colours, and more picturesque attitudes, by the dark and lurid atmosphere with which they are surrounded.

Of all the scenes of desolation, those produced by the Plague, which is pre-eminently “the Scourge of God,” possess the most singular and striking features. It is more awful than the volcano, the tornado, or the earthquake. It resembles, in its effects, the general deluge; breaking up the very foundations of the living world, and leaving behind it a universal wreck. It is not the triumph of Death, as an individual conqueror; it is the invasion of the “King of Terrors,”

with all his armies; trampling to the dust prostrate myriads, with all the monuments of human wisdom and human pride. When Omnipotence goes forth arrayed in all the attributes of terror, marching through the land in indignation, and crushing the nations in anger, this is presented as one of the most dreadful accompaniments: "Before him went the pestilence!" (Habakkuk, iii. 5.) It has been observed, concerning its ravages, that one dread year

Hath done the work of ages; and the Plague
Mocks in his fury the slow hand of time.

It is not wonderful that the imagination, even while it shudders, should be attracted by such a scene: as the eye of the poor bird is fascinated by the very animals that paralyze it with dread. It masters all the feelings, by seizing on the weakness, the timidity of the heart.

— As thunder quails
The inferior creatures of the air and earth,
So bows the Plague at once all human souls;
And the brave man, beside the natural coward,
Walks trembling.

Wilson's City of the Plague.

Happily, too, scenes of this kind are of such rare occurrence, that, to the great majority, the horrors they present are rather objects of conjecture than of experience; and a description gratifies curiosity, as well as awakens the deepest sympathy.

The great model of such descriptions is that which Thucydides has given of the *Plague of Athens*. He has introduced it in the second book of his History of the Peloponnesian War, during which it raged; and he has finished it with all the correctness and severe brevity by which his style is characterised. It is a perfect specimen of elegant historical description, as distinguished from the poetical, and even the fictitious. As he was not only a spectator of the dreadful scene, but one of the few who recovered after having been seized with the distemper, he states the various circumstances with great feeling, but with conciseness, simplicity, and calm solemnity. Nothing is wanting, and nothing redundant. The style is perspicuous and energetic, without amplification; and the ornaments employed are so completely incorporated with the substance of the narrative, that their richness appears only when its texture is minutely examined. The whole account is finished in a manner worthy of the historian, of whom it has been justly said, that he always composed with the spirit of a poet. We may present to the general reader the substance of the most characteristic and picturesque passages in this celebrated description; omitting those which enter into the details of the symptoms and effects of the disease.

Early in the Summer of the second year of the war, when the Peloponnesians invaded Attica, the first symptoms appeared of a Plague, unequalled within the memory of man; which originated in Ethiopia, and spread over Egypt, and the greater part of the Persian Empire, before it reached Greece. The Physicians were at first utterly at a loss how to treat it: nay, they fell victims to the disease the more assiduously they attempted to check it: and to the very last, all human skill was unavailing. When recourse was had to supplications in the Temples, to Oracles, and to various religious rites, all was of no effect: till at last men abandoned them in despair, overcome by the violence of the disease. It was observed that before its appearance, the country was remarkably free from other disorders: and those that did prevail, all terminated in this great malady. Those who enjoyed perfect health too, were suddenly seized, without any apparent cause, with the most violent symptoms. Though the bodies of the sick were not very hot to the touch, yet inwardly they were so scorched, that they could not bear the lightest covering, not even the finest linen; but were left quite naked. They felt also an irresistible desire to be plunged into cold water; and many who were not properly attended, threw themselves into wells, hurried on by inextinguishable thirst: but whether they drank much or little, their agony was undiminished. They remained restless and sleepless; and yet the body did not seem to waste; but continued vigorous till the seventh and ninth day, when death commonly ensued. In most cases, those who recovered felt the most serious injuries; commonly losing some¹ of their members; and very frequently their memory so completely failed, that they lost all recollection both of themselves and their friends.—One indication of the virulence of the disease, which exceeded all that had ever visited humanity, appeared in this: that none of the birds or beasts which prey on human flesh, ever approached the dead bodies, many of which lay unburied; or if they tasted them, they died. This was particularly observable among the dogs: and the total disappearance of such birds from places where the dead lay, was very striking.* Persons of all descriptions, whether weak or strong, whether well or ill attended, and whatever prescriptions they followed, sunk equally under the ravages of this dreadful malady. One of the most affecting circumstances attending it was—a deep dejection of mind, produced by its first attack: in consequence of which, those who were infected, sunk at once into despair, and yielded themselves up to the disease without a struggle. Such, also, was the rapidity with which the infection spread among them, that they perished like sheep.† This was the great cause of the exten-

* We naturally ask, were such animals so common in Attica, that their disappearance at this eventful crisis attracted notice? What were the particular species with which the country was so much infested? Wolves, it is said, were never extirpated from Greece; but were they, or similar tribes, so numerous in Attica,—a plain country, and at this time very populous?—These are curious inquiries to which we would direct the attention of Classical Naturalists, as calculated to throw light on the state of Greece at one of the most interesting periods of its history.

† Such is the literal translation of the language of Thucydides; which leaves it doubtful whether he refers to the rapidity of a distemper among a flock of sheep, or the forlorn situation of the dying animals.

sive mortality : for, if fear prevented any from attending on their sick friends, these died in helpless solitude ; and if others did attend, they fell victims to the disease. Such was the common fate of the compassionate, who were ashamed not to wait on their friends, when abandoned by servants, who could no longer endure the groans of the sick. The only persons who could do this with safety, were those who had recovered from the disease; for no one ever died of a second attack. Such were regarded by others as peculiarly happy ; and were themselves so much overjoyed, as to entertain the vain hope, that no other disease would ever be fatal to them.

The calamity was greatly increased by the general removal of the inhabitants from the country into the city ; where, having no houses, but being obliged to live in small booths, in which they could scarcely breathe, during the summer heat, they perished in the greatest confusion ; lying together in heaps, the dying upon the dead, and the dead on the dying. Such heaps were seen also in the streets, and about the public wells, to which they had gone to allay their thirst. Even the Temples, in which tents had been erected, were filled with the bodies of those who expired there : for in this season of calamity and despair, the sacredness of places was entirely neglected. All regulations about sepulture were also disregarded ; and all buried the bodies of their friends wherever they could find a grave. Some whose sepulchres were already filled with the members of their own family, were obliged to take possession of the tombs of others. Funeral piles erected by one party, were also suddenly seized upon by another, for burning the bodies which they brought thither : and frequently while one was consuming, they threw another upon it, and went away.

Lucretius has left a poetical copy of the same picture, a comparison of which with the original, would be instructive to the student of elegant composition. He has introduced it at the end of his celebrated philosophical poem, on the Nature of Things : and has executed it with all the characteristic beauties of his manner.—When the subject admits of it, and when he escapes from the rubbish of a false system of philosophy, Lucretius displays the genuine and the best qualities of a poetic mind ; natural, manly, unaffected ; with a lively relish for the graphical and picturesque. He is never captivated with any thing puerile or overstrained : and he paints with a freedom and freshness of expression, that give all his figures life and character. With less of the majesty, the harmony, and amplifications of Virgil, he is more terse, graphical, and original. The description of the Plague of Athens is regarded as one of the most beautiful and least exceptionable parts of the poem. It is a poetical amplification of the narrative of Thucydides, and presents the peculiar beauties which such an amplification admits. It follows the order of the narrative, expanding the circumstances which

are most striking, and introducing others that harmonize with the general exhibition. The least interesting part is that in which the symptoms and effects of the disease are described with a minuteness that is tedious, and perhaps disagreeable; into which he was betrayed by his characteristic fondness for philosophical, or rather "atomic" details. Other circumstances are amplified with great propriety and correctness of taste, and form very picturesque combinations. On comparing the two accounts, however, it will be found that these amplifications, though poetically beautiful, do not always deepen the impression; for simple brevity, like that of the historian, is better suited to pathos, than more expanded and glittering descriptions.—We may refer only to one or two passages. The statement of the historian, that all the resources of medical knowledge were tried in vain, is very poetically expressed:—

Nec requies erat ulla mali, defessa jacebant
Corpora: mussabat tacito Medicina timore.
Medicine hesitated in silent fear.

This may remind us of Milton's picture:—

Dire was the tossing, deep the groans: Despair
Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch.

We shall merely add the concluding paragraph, from Good's translation, though the phraseology is not the most natural:—

Nor longer now the costly rites prevailed
Of ancient burial, erst punctilious kept:
For all rov'd restless, with distracted mind,
From scene to scene; and worn with grief and toil
Gave to their friends th' interment chance allow'd.
And direst exigence impell'd them, oft,
Headlong, to deeds most impious; for the pyres
Funereal soiz'd they, rear'd not by themselves,
And with loud dirge, and wailing wild, o'er these
Plac'd their own dead; amid th' unhallow'd blaze
With blood contending, rather than resign
The tomb thus gain'd, or quit th' enkindling corse.

Nec mos ille sepulturæ remanebat in urbe,
Quo pius hic populus semper consuerat humari:
Perturbatus enim totus repedabat, et unus
Quisque suum pro re consortem moestus humabat.
Multaque vi subita paupertas horrida suasit:
Namque suos consanguineos aliena rogorum
Insuper extracta ingenti clamore locabant,
Subdestantque faces; multo cum sanguine sepe
Rixantes potius, quam corpora desererentur.

The classical reader will also recollect Virgil's description (in the third Georgic) of a contagious distemper which raged among the cattle, in the Alpine regions. It contains many new and picturesque circumstances, painted with all the rich colourings of his pencil: such as—the cattle languishing in the stalls; the ox suddenly falling down, when drawing the plough; while the sad husbandman loosens from the yoke the

surviving ox, that sympathized with the fate of his companion; the plough left in the unfinished furrow; and the victim, at the altar, while the priests were preparing it for being sacrificed, suddenly dropping down before receiving the fatal blow.—Ovid also has painted similar scenes, in the seventh book of his *Metamorphoses*, where he describes the pestilence sent by Juno, to waste Aegina, the ravages of which were compensated by the transformation of ants into the celebrated myrmidons. He has presented a miniature of the pictures both of Lucretius and Virgil, with some interesting additions, and many touches in his own peculiar style; having great beauty, but injured with occasional conceits, which scarcely accord with the solemnity of the subject.

These celebrated descriptions, especially that of Thucydides, were evidently kept in view by Boccaccio, in his description of the Plague of Florence; yet the resemblance appears only in the general manner—in the arrangement of the narrative—and in the dignity, perspicuity, and spirit of the style. He evidently paints from his own observation, with freshness, with truth, and with a lively feeling of the peculiarities of the scene. The scenery, too, is Italian; and, though the incidents correspond to those which are usually produced by the dreadful malady, yet they have many circumstances about them characteristic of the middle ages. The language is graceful, easy, and at the same time grave; but it has more of the native fluency and amplification of the Italian, than of the terseness, the brevity, and condensation of the Attic diction.—We shall, as before, give the substance of the most characteristic passages.

This dreadful malady came from the East, where it had broken out some years before, and proceeded gradually Westward, till it reached Florence, in 1348: where, notwithstanding all that human foresight could suggest, by keeping the city clean, excluding all suspected persons, joining in public prayers and frequent processions, the most alarming symptoms began to appear. These were chiefly, bleeding at the nose, tumours in the groin and arm-pits, like eggs or small apples, and at last purple spots over the body. All medical aid was unavailing: scarcely any recovered; but the infected commonly died on the 3d day, without fever or other violent accompaniments. The infection was so rapidly communicated, that the disease spread like fire when it meets with fresh combustibles; not merely from intercourse or contact with the sick, but also from touching their clothes, or any thing which they had touched. It was communicated even to the inferior animals, if they touched any thing belonging to the infected. One instance of this kind I particularly noticed. The rags of a poor man just dead, were thrown into the street; and two hogs that passed at the time, after rooting among them, and shaking them about their mouths, in less than an hour, turned round

and died on the spot. The alarm thus produced, led to various contrivances for guarding against contagion; all having the cruel effect of avoiding intercourse with the sick. Some regarding temperance as the best preservative, made parties and shut themselves up from the rest of the world; eating and drinking moderately; and diverting themselves with music and such other entertainments as they could find within doors; and never listening to any thing from without to make them uneasy. Others trusted to free living; and therefore indulged every appetite; drinking and revelling incessantly from tavern to tavern, or in private houses, which were frequently found deserted by the owners; yet taking care, amid all this irregularity, not to come near the infected. Amid the general distress, all laws human and divine were disregarded: for as the proper officers were either dead, or sick, or left without assistance, every one acted as he pleased. A third class adopted a middle course, avoiding the strictness of the former, and the intemperance of the latter; but, indulging moderately in eating and drinking, they walked about freely, smelling odours and nosegays, deeming it of importance thus to stimulate the brain; for they supposed the whole atmosphere to be tainted by the dead bodies and the various effects of the distemper. Multitudes believing the only safety to consist in flight, left the city, their houses, relatives, and effects, and hurried into the country; as if they thought that the wrath of God was confined within the walls; or that none ought to stay in a place thus doomed to destruction.—Many, among all these classes, were seized as well as others: and those who set the example of forsaking their friends, languished themselves without meeting with any compassion. Such, indeed, was the general terror, that brother fled from brother, the wife from the husband, and what is more unusual, the parent from the child. Hence multitudes of the sick could obtain no help but what the charity of friends, who were very few, or the avarice of servants supplied. Servants, too, were scarce, extravagant in their demands, and so unskilful, that they were fit only to reach what was called for, and observe when the patients died: while their love of money often cost them their lives.—From the difficulty of procuring attendance, and the necessity of procuring men servants to wait upon the sick of both sexes, decorum and propriety were overlooked in this dreadful emergency; the effects of which were afterwards felt in the manners of those who survived.

Necessity also introduced many customs before unknown. It had been usual, when a person died, for women, who were friends and neighbours, to meet at the house and join in lamentation with the relatives; and for the men to assemble at the door, with a number of clergy; while persons of the same rank with the deceased carried the body, with tapers and singing, to the church in which he had desired to be buried. Now, however, instead of a crowd of women to lament over them, multitudes passed out of the world without a single person to attend them. Few had the tears of their friends at their departure. Nay, these friends would laugh and make themselves merry; for even

the women had learned to prefer safety to every other consideration, and they thought mirth most likely to secure it.

A corpse was never attended by more than ten or twelve; and these mere hirelings, who put themselves under the bier, carried it with the greatest haste to the nearest church, and buried it without ceremony, wherever they could find room.

Among persons of the middle and lower ranks the scene was still more affecting. As they remained at home from poverty or hope of assistance, they fell sick by thousands; and, having no one to attend them, they generally died. Some breathed their last on the streets, and others shut up in their own houses; when the stench of their bodies gave the first notice to the neighbourhood of their death. Every place, indeed, was filled with the dead. At last it became customary, from a regard to the living as well as pity for the dead, for the neighbours, assisted by whatever porters they could meet with, to clear all the houses, and lay the bodies at the doors. Great numbers might be seen brought out in this manner every morning; and were carried away on biers or tables, two or three at a time. It has sometimes happened that a wife and her husband, two or three brothers, and a father and son, have been thus laid together on the same bier. It has been observed, also, that whilst two or three priests have walked with crucifixes before a corpse, two or three sets of porters have fallen in with them; and, when they knew but of one, they have buried six or eight more. Nor was there any one to follow and shed a few tears over them: for such was the state of things, that men's lives were no more regarded than the lives of so many beasts. At last, consecrated ground could no longer contain the numbers that were continually brought for interment; especially when there was a desire to bury each in the part allotted to his family. It became necessary, therefore, to dig trenches and put the bodies in them by hundreds, piling them up in rows, like goods stowed in a ship, and throwing on a little earth till the trenches were completely filled.

The adjacent country was in similar circumstances. To omit the different castles, which presented the same appearance with the city in miniature; you might see the poor distressed labourers, with their families, languishing without assistance on the highways, in the fields, and in their own houses, and dying rather like cattle than human beings. At last, growing dissolute in their manners, like the citizens, and careless of every thing, from an apprehension that every day would be their last, they thought not so much of improving, as of using their substance for their present support. Hence the flocks and herds, and the dogs, ever faithful to their masters, would wander without any notice being taken of them, among the forsaken crops; and frequently, after filling themselves during the day, would return home of their own accord, like rational creatures, at night. It is thought, that thus upwards of 100,000 persons perished in the city alone, between March and July.—What magnificent buildings, what noble palaces, were then depopulated! What families became extinct! What riches, and vast possessions, were left without a known heir to

inherit them! What numbers of both sexes, in the prime of youth, whom, in the morning, Galen, Hippocrates, and Esculapius himself, would have declared to be in perfect health, after dining heartily with their friends here, have supped with their departed friends in the other world!

We may now advert to some other accounts of the same pestilence which Boccaccio thus witnessed and described. Dr. Mead observes, "that it seized country after country for five years together, (from 1345 to 1350,) and produced the greatest mortality that has happened in latter ages: making such heavy destruction in all places to which it came, that it is said to have dispeopled the earth of more than half its inhabitants." In 1349 it ravaged England, and depopulated London, which was then rising rapidly into importance.* It is remarkable that this was during the youth of Chaucer the poet, a contemporary of Boccaccio, who had thus an opportunity of catching impressions from the same awful scenes that affected so powerfully the feelings and imagination of the Italian. None of the biographers of Chaucer, however, have adverted fully to this circumstance, or have examined its influence on his character and writings; except Godwin, who has indulged in some ingenious conjectures on the subject, in his entertaining life of that poet.† "It has fallen to the lot of few poets, he observes, to witness an event so awful, so desolating, and so astonishing. Though Chaucer has left no documents on the subject in his works, we may be assured that he saw many things at this time, and heard more, the recollection of which could never be effaced from his mind." It is surprising, therefore, that so few references to it should occur in his works. The plan of the Canterbury tales, indeed, is evidently connected with it. The company, who engage in story telling, are pilgrims who accidentally meet in the Tabard Inn, Southwark, on their way to Canterbury, to visit the shrine of Thomas a Becket, then the great object of superstitious veneration: and to present offerings of gratitude to the tutelary Saint for his protection, most probably during the late pestilence.

To Canterbury they wend
The holy blissful martyr for to seke,
That them had holpen when that they were seke.

Another reference to it occurs in his description of the Dr. of Physic, connected with a stroke of satire at his parsimony and avarice. Though he was richly clad—yet he was but easy of dispense :

He keptē that he wan in Pestilence.
For Gold in Physike is a cordiall:
Therefore he loved gold in special.

* The population at that time has been estimated at from 100,000 to 200,000.

† Vol I, Chap. 13.

It is probable that many of our readers have had their interest in this dreadful event awakened by some graphic sketches of its ravages, in Galt's last novel—“Rothelan.” The story refers to the reign of Edward III. and derives its chief interest from the views which it exhibits of some of the prominent characters and events of that brilliant era. Edmund de Crosby, Lord of Rothelan, fell in the Scottish wars, during the minority of that prince; and left an infant son to the care of his brother, Sir Amias, in Crosby-house, London; who endeavoured to get possession of the estates, by denying the legitimacy of the child. As Lady Rothelan was an Italian, and had been privately married, this nefarious design was for some time successful; but, at last, the claims of the young Earl were fully established, and his uncle's guilt duly punished. Witnesses of his mother's marriage were sent for from Florence, at the time when the plague raged in that city; and the ship in which they embarked is represented as having first brought the infection to London. Various circumstances had excited great interest in the arrival of the vessel in the river, which is thus described:—

Crowds had gone to see her. “The Lady Albertina, with Rothelan and Adonijah, were among the first who hastened to greet her arrival, and they stood together at a window to see her pass to the moorings at London bridge. ‘It is strange,’ said the lady, ‘and what can it portend, that none of the boats go close to her, but all you see suddenly suspend their oars as they approach her?’ ‘She hath had a hard voyage,’ rejoined Rothelan, ‘look how dishevelled she is in the cordage. Some of her top-sails too are hanging in rags; and I can see, as it were, strips of green moss down the seams of the others. They have surely been long unhandled.’ ‘The crowd on the shores,’ added the lady, ‘grows silent as she passes.’ ‘There are many persons aboard,’ said Rothelan. ‘Yes,’ replied Adonijah, ‘but only the man at the helm hath for some time moved; all the others are in idleness—still, still.—A cold fear is crawling on my bones, to see so many persons, and every one monumental.’ ‘Some of those who are looking over the side,’ said Rothelan, partaking in some degree of the Jew's dread, ‘droop their heads upon their breasts, and take no heed of any object. Look at those on the deck; they sit as if they were indeed marble, resting on their elbows like effigies on a tomb.’ Rothelan paused for a moment; as yet he saw nothing to alarm, but only the man at the helm, who, the instant that the ship touched the ground, had leaped on shore, and was coming towards him. Rothelan ran forward to meet him, in order to inquire how it was that all on board appeared so motionless; but scarcely had he advanced ten paces, when, casting his eyes forward, he saw that each of those who were leaning over the vessel's side, and resting on the deck, were dead men, from whose hideous anatomy the skin had peeled and the flesh had fallen. They had all died of the plague.”

The following view is given of the general appearance of the city, during the ravages of the Plague, in the peculiar style of an old chronicle, from which it is supposed to be taken:—

It was as if Heaven had repented the making of mankind, and was shovelling them all into the sepulchre. Justice was forgotten, and her courts deserted. The terrified jailers fled from the felons that were in fetters;—the innocent and the guilty leagued themselves together, and kept within their prisons for safety;—the grass grew in the market-places;—the cattle went moaning up and down the fields, wondering what had become of their keepers; the rooks and the ravens came into the towns, and built their nests in mute belfries;—silence was universal, save when some infected wretch was seen clambering at a window. For a time all commerce was in coffins and shrouds; but even that ended. Shrift there was none;—churches and chapels were open, but neither priest nor penitent entered; all went to the charnel-house. The sexton and the physician were cast into the same deep and wide grave;—the testator and his heirs and executors were hurled from the same cart into the same hole together. Fires became extinguished, as if its element too had expired; the seams of the sailorless ships yawned to the sun. Though doors were open, and coffers unwatched, there was no theft;—all offences ceased, and no crime but the universal woe of the pestilence was heard of among men. The wells overflowed, and the conduits ran to waste; the dogs banded themselves together, having lost their masters, and ran howling over all the land;—horses perished of famine in their stalls;—old friends but looked at one another when they met, keeping themselves far aloof;—creditors claimed no debts, and courtiers performed their promises;—little children went wandering up and down, and numbers were seen dead in all corners.

The account given of the first abatement of the distemper is also striking:—

For a short time there was a silence, and every person in the street for a moment stood still; and London was as dumb as a church-yard. Again the sound of a bell was heard; for it was that sound, so long unheard, which arrested the fugitive multitude, and caused their silence. At the third toll an universal shout arose. The people fell on their knees, and with anthems of thankfulness rejoiced in the dismal sound of that tolling death-bell; for it was a signal of the plague being abated.

These sketches are among the most striking in the work.*

The ravages of infectious diseases in England, at different periods, have been frequently described both in history and

* Rothelan is very unequal both in the plan and execution. Like some other of the Author's large works, it extends over too wide a range, and passes from one incident to another, in a desultory manner, frequently presenting rough outlines, when there were excellent materials for fuller pictures. Galt succeeds better in painting antiquated characters, with low provincial humour, than in delineating the manners of refined society, or even picturesque scenery.

fiction. The poetical reader will recollect Dr. Armstrong's account of the sweating sickness in 1483, which first broke out when Henry VII. landed at Milford Haven; arising, it is supposed, from the close confinement of his troops in the ships. The records of medicine, it has been said, offer nothing analogous to this distemper. Its symptoms and effects are described by Armstrong, with as much minuteness as is consistent with poetry; and he adds a graphic picture of what has been regarded as the most unaccountable circumstance attending it—that it was confined to the English, and seized on them in every country.

Where'er they fled, the Fates pursued.
 Others, with hopes more specious, cross'd the main,
 To seek protection in far distant skies:
 But none they found. It seem'd, the general air,
 From pole to pole, from Atlas to the east,
 Was then at enmity with English blood.
 For, but the race of England, all were safe
 In foreign climes: nor did this fury taste
 The foreign blood which England then contained.
 Where should they fly? The circumambient heaven
 Involv'd them still; and every breeze was bane.

Art of Preserving Health, Book III.

The last appearance of the Plague in London was in 1665, when its ravages were as dreadful as at any former period.* Its effects, at that time, are now generally known, by the spirited accounts of them in some very popular works. The chief source of information is "The History of the Plague in London, in 1665," by Daniel de Foe. Though the narrative is imaginary, it is valued by medical men as "preserving facts concerning the malady often new and important." De Foe, though a native of London, was very young when the Plague was raging; but he had opportunities of collecting much information concerning it, which he has embodied in his narrative. He has introduced, also, some proclamations, and other public documents, which disclose many striking circumstances, and give probability to his general statements. It is in the minuter details and incidents that he indulges his imagination, for the purpose of weaving a story, in the spirit of "Robinson Crusoe." He represents himself as having voluntarily remained in the city, during the whole time of its continuance; and describes every scene with all the minuteness and individual feeling of an eye-witness.—The account given of the first indications of the distemper, and the unwillingness of men to believe in it, with the fluctuations between hope and fear, till they were at last convinced of the sad reality, by its rapid progress from Westminster, where it broke out—to the heart of the city, in which it became most fatal—is very graphical. It had made slow progress from Sept. 1664, till the middle of June, 1665, when it spread general dismay.

* It carried off upwards of 100,000 individuals.

At the West end of the town, their consternation was very great ; and the richest sort of people, especially the nobility and gentry, from the West part of the city thronged out of town, with their families and servants in an unusual manner ; and this was more particularly seen in White-Chapel, that is to say, the Broad-street where I lived : indeed nothing was to be seen but waggons and carts, with goods, women, servants, children, &c.; coaches filled with people of the better sort, and horsemen attending them, and all hurrying away ; then empty waggons and carts appeared, and spare horses with servants, who it was apparent were returning or sent from the country to fetch more people : Besides innumerable numbers of men on horseback, some alone, others with servants, and generally speaking, all loaded with baggage, and fitted out for travelling, as any one might perceive by their appearance. This hurry of the people was such for some weeks, that there was no getting at the Lord Mayor's door without exceeding difficulty ; there was such pressing and crowding there to get passes and certificates of health, for such as travelled abroad ; for, without these, there was no being admitted to pass through the towns upon the road, or to lodge in an inn.

The face of London, (he adds,) was now indeed strangely altered, sorrow and sadness sat upon every face, and though some part were not yet overwhelmed, yet all looked deeply concerned ; and as we saw it apparently coming on, so every one looked on himself, and his family, as in the utmost danger. London might well be said to be all in tears ; the mourners did not go about the streets indeed, for nobody put on black, or made a formal dress of mourning, for their nearest friends ; but the voice of mourning was truly heard in the streets ; the shrieks of women and children at the windows, and doors of their houses, where their nearest relations were, perhaps dying, or just dead, were so frequent to be heard, as we passed the streets, that it was enough to pierce the stoutest heart in the world, to hear them.

After mentioning various prodigies which the excited imaginations of men led them to suppose that they saw, he observes—

One mischief always introduces another ; these terrors and apprehension of the people led them to a thousand weak, foolish, and wicked things, which they wanted not a sort of people really wicked to encourage them to : and this was running about to fortune-tellers, cunning men, and astrologers to know their fortunes, or as it is vulgarly expressed, to have their fortunes told them, their nativities calculated, and the like : and this folly presently made the town swarm with a wicked generation of pretenders to magic, to the black art, as they called it, and I know not what ; nay, to a thousand worse dealings with the devil than they were really guilty of ; and this trade grew so open and so generally practised that it became common to have signs and inscriptions set up at doors, here lives a fortune-teller ; here lives an astrologer ; here you may have your nativity calculated,

and the like; and friar Bacon's brazen-head, which was the usual sign of these people's dwellings, was to be seen almost in every street, or else the sign of mother Shipton, or of Merlin's head, and the like.—It was incredible and scarce to be imagined how the posts of houses and corners of streets were plastered over with doctor's bills, and papers of ignorant fellows quacking and tampering in physic; and inviting people to come to them for remedies, which were generally set off with such flourishes as these, viz: INFALLIBLE preventive pills against the plague. NEVER-FAILING preservatives against the infection, &c.

He gives a minute account, from the public documents, of the regulations of the magistracy, for guarding against contagion, particularly by shutting up whole families in houses where the disease had entered,—which he thinks was often done without proper discrimination,—instead of providing Pest Houses, of which only a few were erected. The consequence of such confinement was, that many secretly made their escape from their houses, and spread the infection wherever they went. The disease was at the height from Midsummer to September; during which period, he presents some awful pictures of the state of the city—particularly, the progress of carts during the night to collect dead bodies from the different houses, and the burying of them in large pits dug for the purpose.

Sometimes heaps and throngs of people would burst out of the alley, most of them women, making dreadful clamour, mixed or compounded of screeches, cryings, and calling one another, that we could not conceive what to make of it; almost all the dead part of the night the dead cart stood at the end of that alley, for if it went in, it could not well turn again, and could go in but a little way. There, I say, it stood to receive dead bodies; and, as the church was but a little way off, if it went away full it would soon be back again. It is impossible to describe the most horrible cries and noise the poor people would make at their bringing the dead bodies of their children and friends out to the cart; and, by the number, one would have thought there had been none left behind, or that there were people enough for a small city living in those places. Several times they cried murder, sometimes fire, but it was easy to perceive that it was all distraction, and the complaints of distressed and distempered people.—One cart, they told us, going up Shoreditch, was forsaken by the drivers, or being left to one man to drive, he died in the street, and the horses going on, overthrew the cart, and left the bodies, some thrown here, some there, in a dismal manner. Another cart was, it seems, found in the great pit in Finsbury-fields; the driver being dead, or having been gone and abandoned it, and the horses going too near it, the cart fell in and drew the horses in also. It was suggested that the driver was thrown in with it, and that the cart fell upon him, by reason his whip was seen to be in the pit among the bodies; but that, I suppose, could not be certain.—In our parish of Aldgate, the dead-

carts were several times, as I have heard, found standing at the church-yard gate, full of dead bodies ; but neither bell-man or driver, or any one else with it. Neither in these, or many other cases, did they know what bodies they had in their cart, for sometimes they were let down with ropes out of balconies and out of windows; and sometimes the bearers brought them to the cart, sometimes other people ; nor, as the men themselves said, did they trouble themselves to keep any account of the numbers.

We shall confine ourselves to one extract more, giving a view of the ships in the river.

One day I went to Greenwich, and walked up to the top of the hill, under which the town stands, and on the East side of the town, to get a prospect of the river ; but it was a surprising sight to see the number of ships which lay in rows, two and two, and in some places, two or three such lines in the breadth of the river, and this is not only up quite to the town, between the houses which we call Ratcliff and Redriff, which they name the pool, but even down the whole river, as far as the hills give us leave to see it. I cannot guess at the number of ships, but I think there must have been several hundred sail, and I could not but applaud the contrivance ; for 10,000 people and more, who attended ship affairs, were certainly sheltered here from the violence of the contagion, and lived very safe and very easy. I observed also, that, as the violence of the plague had increased, so the ships that had families on board removed and went farther off, till, as I was told, some went quite away to sea, and put into such harbours and safe roads on the North coast as they could best come at.—But it was also true, that all the people who thus left the land, and thus lived on board the ships, were not entirely safe from the infection ; for many died and were thrown overboard into the river, some in coffins, and some, as I heard, without coffins, whose bodies were seen sometimes to drive up and down, with the tide in the river.

This work is written in De Foe's usual manner, with a minuteness of statement that is sometimes tedious and confused ; but which makes us perfectly familiar with the scenes, and often becomes deeply pathetic.

The length to which these extracts have extended, prevents us from dwelling on the view of the same scenes presented with great force and tenderness in Wilson's "City of the Plague," which employs the materials furnished by De Foe, but throws over them rich poetical colouring. By introducing some interesting characters from the lakes of Cumberland, who were in London during the continuance of the Plague, and the most of whom died of it, he has combined the softness of rural scenery and feelings, with the horrors of the pestilence ; while the contrast deepens the general impression. We must refer the reader, for a view of its various beauties, to the poem itself,—which will soon be more generally known by the publication of a second edition,—and confine ourselves

to an extract or two, descriptive of the general aspect of the city at the commencement, and during the rage of the pestilence.

Like a thunder-peal,
One morn a rumour turn'd the city pale;
And the tongues of men wild-staring on each other
Utter'd with faltering voice one little word,
“The Plague!”

On the restless multitude,
Thoughtlessly toiling through a busy life,
Nor hearing in the tumult of their souls
The ordinary language of decay,
A voice came down that made itself be heard,
And they started from delusion when the touch
Of Death's benumbing fingers suddenly
Swept off whole crowded streets into the grave.
Then rose a direful struggle with the Pest!
And all the ordinary forms of life
Mov'd onwards with the violence of despair.
Wide flew the crowded gates of theatres,
And a pale frightful audience, with their souls
Looking in perturbation through the glare
Of a convulsive laughter, sat and shouted
At obscene ribaldry and mirth profane.
There was yet heard parading through the streets
War-music, and the soldier's tossing plumes
Mov'd with their wonted pride. O idle show
Of these poor worthless instruments of death,
Themselves devoted! Childish mockery!
As yet the Sabbath-day—though truly fear
Rather than piety fill'd the house of God—
Receiv'd an outward homage. On the street
Friends yet met friends, and dar'd to interchange
A cautious greeting—and firesides there were
Where still domestic happiness surviv'd
'Mid an unbroken family.

Once at noon-day
Alone I stood upon a tower that rises
From the centre of the city. I look'd down
With awe upon that world of misery;
Nor for a while could say that I beheld
Aught save one wide gleam indistinctly flung
From that bewildering grandeur: till at once
The objects all assum'd their natural form,
And grew into a City stretching round
On every side, far as the bounding sky.
Mine eyes first rested on the squares that lay
Without one moving figure, with fair trees
Lifting their tufted heads unto the light,
Sweet, sunny spots of rural imagery
That gave a beauty to magnificence.
Silent as nature's solitary glens
Slept the long streets—and mighty London seem'd,
With all its temples, domes, and palaces,
Like some sublime assemblage of tall cliffs
That bring down the deep stillness of the heavens
To shroud them in the desert. Groves of masts
Rose through the brightness of the sun-smote river;
But all their flags were struck, and every sail
Was lower'd. Many a distant land had felt
The sudden stoppage of that mighty heart.

We are tempted to add, even to this long article, a few statements from high medical authority,* which are at once instructive and consolatory. Since 1665, the plague has

* Parr's Medical Dictionary.

vaniſhed from London, and all other epidemics ſeem to have become less malignant in this country, owing most probably to the different and improved habits of ſociety—superior cleanliness in dress and perſon—the freer admission of air into the ſtreets and houses—greater attention to the poor, in times of ſcarcity—the more abundant use of fresh vegetable food, and other antiseptic diet—and, it is added (what will be gratifying to many), the universal use of tea. Cloſer investigation, and the increased experience of medical practice, have ascertained that the Plague is not, as was ſuppoſed, *highly infectious*. It commonly arises from ſome contagious matter, which may by prudence be guarded againſt; ſometimes, miasma in the air, which with proper care may be checked or diſſipated; or ſome deleterious matter conveyed in various ſubſtances, againſt which precautions can also be employed. Contact, or confinement in a cloſe room, with the ſick, ſeems to be the principal means of communicating the infection; while proper attention to the ſeparation of the healthy from the diseased, has been found ſucceſſful in preventing it. Of late, too, the Plague, though always dangerous, has frequently been conquered by medical treatment. There is reaſon to hope, therefore, that the advanced ſtate of ſcience, and the general improvements of ſociety, will now guard these kingdoms againſt its ravages; and that the diſſion of knowledge and civilization over the world may reduce it every where within the limits of ordinary diſtempers.

W.

ON A FLOWER, PLANTED ON MY BIRTH-DAY.

I was a wild, yet tender thing,
In childhood's early day:
I loved the free-bird's merry wing,
The gentle tears of infant Spring,
And the soft smiles of May—
I loved our cottage in the glen :
'Tis ruin'd now—'twas smiling then:

No matter—once there was a flower,
My mother gave to me ;
'Twas planted on my natal hour,
And was, of all our ſummer-bower,
The favourite of the bee :
My mother oft in ſport would say,
" You're children of the ſelf-same day ! "

I loved it well—it was, in faith,
A pretty little flower !
I loved to ſhield its ſummer-wreath
From the cold north-wind's wintry breath,
And the approaching shower :
Blooming beneath a ſunny sky,
I never dreamt to ſee it die.

At laſt, methought its roſeate hue
Waned fainter every morrow ;
I ſaw it fade—the morning dew
Fell cheerily, but the flower grew
Into a thing of ſorrow !
I mark'd it, till by ſlow decay
Its blooming ſpirit paſſ'd away !

Its ſpirit paſſ'd—I wept the fate
Of my poor garden-brother !
It was ſo beautiful a mate,
That when it left me desolate,
I might not find another
To rival that departed one—
My heart was with it—it was gone !

" Tis ſtrange ! full many a day has paſſ'd
Since that ill-fated flower,
Baring its bosom to the blast,
Sicken'd, and ſigh'd, and ſunk at laſt,
Within its native bower.
" Tis ſtrange—and yet I know not why—
It ſeem'd to point my destiny !

I " mark'd it well—each morn has led
To ſome new-cherish'd treasure—
Some bud of hope, that flower'd, and fled,
Or ere the evening sky was red,
With all its promis'd pleasure ;
And left the wretched heart in pain,
To ſeek, and to deceiv'd again !

And this is life—and this is love—
And this is beauty's power !—
And thus muſt fame and fortune prove,
False things ! that teach the heart to rove,
Then vanish in an hour !—
Our earliest tear, and latest sigh,
Spring from one ſad fatality.